

Devotional Poetry Vindicated,

IN SOME

OCCASIONAL REMARKS

ON THE LATE

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON'S

ANIMADVERSIONS UPON THAT SUBJECT

IN HIS

LIFE of WALLER,

TO WHICH IS ADDED

A Short Essay on GENIUS.

By DANIEL TURNER, M. A.

I will sing unto the LORD, as long as I live; I will sing
praise unto my GOD, while I have my Being. Pſal. civ. 33.

O X F O R D,

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I N T R O D U C T I O N.

THAT *Dr. Johnson* was an elegant and entertaining Writer, a judicious Critic, and a sincere Friend to the Interest of Religion and Virtue, is readily acknowledged; it is, therefore, the more surprising, that he should attempt to prejudice the Minds of his Readers against *sacred*, and especially *devotional* Poetry, as he has done in his *Life of WALLER*; though when it comes to be coolly examined all he says will appear little more than the mere effusions of a lively Imagination, dressed up in the splendid Garb of pompous Diction.

A sensible and learned Friend, a Clergyman, a Member of the University of Oxford,

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first pointed out to me those extraordinary passages, as what had highly delighted him in the perusal, and with which, I confess, I was much pleased at the first Reading; but going over them again, more at leisure, they appeared to me in a very different Light, and led me to make the following Strictures.

Great Geniuses are apt sometimes to be a little excentric. This appears to have been the Case with the good Doctor, when he wrote those Strictures on *Waller*.

It may be thought, perhaps, by some "That I have mistaken my Author, and that he was not an *Enemy* to devotional Poetry in *reality*." I would hope so, and that those Strictures were the mere Effects of Humour, or of a fit of Hyper-criticisim which happened then to seize him, and not of his settled Judgment: But, as what he has said there, is so unfriendly to that species of Poetry, it certainly deserves some Animadversion.

The

INTRODUCTION. v

The Doctor is right where he says, “ that
 “ it is the Business of Poetry to raise Subjects
 “ that are naturally low, and to give them an
 “ Air of Dignity, clothe their nakedness,
 “ and adorn their natural Meanness with the
 “ Beauties of Tropes and Figures, and the
 “ Flowers of Fancy ;”—And that, in this
 view and respect, many have failed in their
 attempts on divine Subjects; but it should be
 remembered, that though the *Subjects* them-
 selves, in this Case, cannot be more exalted
 than they naturally are, yet *our Ideas* of them
 may be so, by their being set in a more affect-
 ing Light, by elevated and striking Forms of
 Expression. The Truth itself may be essen-
 tially the same, in the plain coarse Garb of
 uncooth, and even ungrammatical Language;
 but it will certainly be more sensibly and
 agreeably felt, in a neat and elegant Dress,
 at least by people of Reading and Taste. The
 harmonious arrangement of many passages in
 Sacred Writ, and the many strong and beau-
 tiful Metaphors and Figures of Speech, in
 which they are delivered, strike the Mind
 more

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more forcibly, and delight it more abundantly than otherwise they would have done.

It may be said, that the Doctor objects only to *uninspired Poetry*, and not to that of the Bible; admitting this, yet is he not mistaken? Have we not many pieces of *uninspired Poetry*, even of the *contemplative and devotional* kind, which both delight and profit us, merely from the Importance of the Subject, the Dignity of the Sentiments, and the harmonious and striking *Manner* in which they are expressed? There is, in short, no Truth but may be sunk or raised, disfigured, or adorned, by the different dress of Language.

As to the Invention of new materials, or Ornaments of Fiction in which lies much of the Art of Poetry, I allow there is no proper Room or even Occasion for them, in *devotional* Subjects especially. All that the Poet has to do here is, to clothe the Truths already invented in a pleasing Garb, suitable to their Nature, and dispose of the various Ideas belonging to them in a poetic Form,

The

INTRODUCTION. vii

The most just Definition of Poetry, says Dr. *Blair* in his elegant Lectures, is,—“ That
 “ it is the Language of Passion, or of an
 “ enlivened Imagination formed, most com-
 “ monly, into regular Numbers.—The pri-
 “ mary aim of the Poet is to please, and to
 “ move; and, therefore, it is to the Imagina-
 “ he speaks: He may and he ought to have
 “ it in his View to instruct and inform—
 “ His Mind is supposed to be animated by
 “ some interesting Object, which fires his
 “ Imagination, or engages his Passions, and
 “ which, of course, communicates to his
 “ Style a peculiar elevation suited to his
 “ Ideas, &c.” All this agrees with the Sen-
 timents I wish to inculcate, though not at all
 with those expressed in the passages which oc-
 casioned these Remarks. However, this notice
 would not have been taken of the Doctor’s
 Animadversions, had they not had so strong
 and manifest a Tendency to lessen our Respect
 for *devotional Poetry*, and deprive the serious
 Christian of much of that Assistance and Plea-

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ture in the Duties of Piety he would otherwise enjoy.

The Doctor sets out, indeed, in these Criticisms with only saying, " That though many attempts have been made to animate Devotion, they have seldom attained their end." Vol. I. p. 413, 414. This is saying rather too much, but in his endeavours to make good this assertion, he says much more, as will, I think, appear in the following pages.

D. T.

Abingdon, Oct. 20, 1785.

OCCASIONAL

OCCASIONAL REMARKS, &c.

WE are often told by those who consider themselves as the best Judges in the Matter, " That the great Truths of the Christian Religion are not proper Subjects for Poetry, because they cannot admit of the Embellishments of creative Genius, or the Ornaments of Fiction, which are the very Life and Soul of poetic Composition."

This has been the Language of some very respectable Critics,* both of our own and other Countries, who seem to have taken their Idea of Poetry, not so much from Nature, as from the Works of the *Greeks* and *Romans*, in which the Ornaments of Fiction do, indeed, abound : But it should be remembered,

* BOILEAU, in particular says,
 " De la Foi d'un Chretien les Mysteres terribles
 " D'Ornamens egayez ne font point Susceptibles."

That is,——The awful Mysteries of the Christian Faith will not admit of a gay and lively dress. True ; not of the frippery Gayeties of mere Wit and licentious Fancy ; yet, certainly, of the more solid Ornaments of the truly sublime and pathetic kind.

that

that though the Pagan Mythology admitted of such kind of Ornaments, and rendered them in a Manner necessary, even to their *sacred Poetry*; yet, that the CHRISTIAN RELIGION, by the Richness and Majesty of its great leading Truths, supercedes the Necessity of fictitious Decorations. Besides, there is a certain kind of Enthusiasm, or extraordinary Elevation of Sentiment, that naturally fires the Mind, fills it with bold Metaphors, and lively Epithets, and leads it into a peculiarly harmonious Arrangement of the Forms of Expression, which sufficiently distinguishes the true poetic Genius, and affords every kind of necessary decoration, intirely independent of the Reveries of Fiction. Accordingly, we find some of the most beautiful and striking Compositions of the poetic kind, that ever appeared in the World, on DIVINE SUBJECTS, particularly in the Bible,*

* Do not the Powers of Soul enchanting Song,
Strong Imag'ry, bold Metaphors, every Charm
Of Eastern Flight sublime; apt Metaphors,
And all the Graces of the Lovely Train,
Divine Simplicity! Assemble, all
In *Sion's* Songs? and bold *Isaiab's* Strains?

Mrs. H. MORE's Introduction to her sacred Drama;
in which elegant little Work we have a further Proof of
the Truth of what I am here endeavouring to establish.

and

and which infinitely excel the most celebrated performances of the Heathens. And no Wonder; for the unparalleled Dignity and Grandeur of the Truths of our Religion furnish us with the best materials for *Poetry*, such as are susceptible of the most pleasing Embellishments, and peculiarly adapted to touch the finer feelings of the Soul, awaken all its great Passions, and consequently produce every Effect that Poetry is capable of producing consistently with the Honour of Virtue. Here, therefore, we have no Occasion for the boasted Aids of fictitious Invention.

If any doubt the Truth of this Observation, let him read, without prejudice, those justly celebrated *Lectures on the sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, by that Ornament of polite Literature, Dr. LOWTH, the present worthy Bishop of London; and what that excellent Critic Mr. Addison has written to the same Purpose in the VIth Vol. of the *Spectator*, No. 453. I will also add, as a farther Confirmation of the Sentiment I am pleading for, what Mr. Racine, a judicious French Author, has said in his Preface to his famous Poem on RELIGION:

“ RELIGION, is a Subject so vast, so interesting, so rich, that it stands in no need of
“ any

“ any other Ornaments than those which may
 “ be drawn from itself, to support its Dignity.
 “ I should lose the Respect due to my Subject,
 “ should I wander into the wide Field of Fic-
 “ tion.” * Accordingly, he severely censures
Sannazar, an Italian Poet, who, in a religious
 Poem, that produced him the favourable Tes-
 timony of two Sovereign Pontiffs, introduces
 a long Train of Sea Nymphs and Goddeses,
 furrounding our LORD JESUS, when walking
 upon the Water, and *Neptune* as kissing his
 Trident at the Sight of him.

Again, the same Writer, in his Preface to his
 Poem upon GRACE, says,—“ It must be ac-
 “ knowledged that the Holy Scriptures furnish
 “ us with the most noble and magnificent
 “ Ideas; and, indeed, that true sublime,
 “ which so universally charms Mankind, that
 “ divine Enthusiasm, that captivates the Soul,
 “ that astonishes and transports it, is no where
 “ else to be found.” †

* Un sujet si vaste, si intéressant, et si riche n'a point
 besoin se soutenir d'autres Ornamens que de ceux qu'il
 fournit de son propre Fond. Je perdrois, le Respect
 que je dois a mon sujet, si je m'egarois en quelques
 Fictions.

† Faut-il avouer que l'Ecriture sante nous fournit
 les Idées les plus nobles, & les plus magnifiques; &
 Yet

Yet still, perhaps, it will be said, " That though Poetry may be admitted in Religious Subjects in general, it can afford us neither pleasure nor profit in our *devotional Exercises*, where the matter is already too great, awful, and sublime; or too plain and simple to admit of poetic decorations, without which it would be insipid and unaffecting."

This is the Idea *Dr. Johnson* has taken up, and sports away with in the Passages we are going to consider. I would only observe here, by the Way, That if the true Genius of Poetry be of divine Original, or the Special Gift of God; as even Heathens themselves allow,* where can it be employed with greater Propriety, than in his Service? —

qu' on trouve point ailleurs ce veritable Sublime, qui charme tous les hommes; cet Enthousiasme divin qui saisit l'ame, qui l'étonne, & qui l'enlève.

* HESIOD in the close of his *Theogonia* sings,

Μῆσαι ὀλυμπιαδὲς κῆραι Διὸς ἀγιοχοῖο.

Olympian Muses, Daughters of great *Jove*.

And, indeed, the many excellent Pieces of sacred Poetry which we have in our own Language, in the Latin of *Buchanan* and *Casimire*, and the French of *Racine*, afford us abundant Evidence in confutation of the Doctor's declamatory Argument.

But

But this leads me to the more particular Remarks which I have made on what the Doctor has said upon this Subject, in which, I trust, the Reader will find all the Candour due to so respectable a Character, as well as that Freedom that the Interest of *devotional Poetry*, which the Doctor has attacked with so much Severity, justly demands.

In the first Volume of his Lives of the Poets, page 414, animadverting on WALLER's sacred Poetry,—The Doctor says,

“ Poetical Devotion cannot *often* please.”

R E M A R K.

This, however, is allowing that it *sometimes* may please. And we all know that the BIBLE, the most delightful Book in the World, abounds with *poetical Devotion*; and, therefore, that kind of Poetry must *please* God, or it would not have been there. It pleases the pious Believer, because he finds it warm his Heart, and impresses it more deeply with a Sense of the Excellency of Religion. And what the Biblical Poetry does in the highest Degree, merely human Compositions may do in a lower, and, indeed, actually have done, in innumerable Instances.

DOCTOR.

D O C T O R.

— “ A Poet may praise the Maker for
 “ his Works, in Lines, which no Reader shall
 “ lay aside.”

R E M A R K.

This looks very much like a Contradiction
 to what was said just before. *Praising* the
 Great Maker of all things in *verse* must be
poetical Devotion, and the Reader of such verse
 must surely be exceedingly pleased if he knows
 not how to *lay aside the Lines* that express it.

D O C T O R.

“ Contemplative Piety, or the intercourse
 “ between God and the human Soul, cannot
 “ be *poetical*. Man, admitted to implore the
 “ Mercy of his Creator, and plead the Merits
 “ of his Redeemer, is already in a higher state
 “ than Poetry can confer.”

R E M A R K.

Are not most of the Psalms *contemplative*
Piety ? And yet all of them *poetically* expressed.
 And with Respect to human Compositions in
 in this way, Experience shews, that Poetry is
 often the Means of warming the Christian's
 pious Affections, elevating his Thoughts, and
 drawing out the Desires of his Soul with more
 Enlargement

Enlargement and Vigour in the Exercises of devout Contemplation ; and, consequently, of rendering it more delightful and profitable than otherwise it would have been. Or, if he should feel this Elevation of Soul the Doctor speaks of, arising merely from the Contemplation of the Greatness and Excellency of the Object of it, that very Elevation, in a poetic Mind, would naturally produce poetic Figures, Epithets, and Forms of Expression. And this, we find, indeed, has been actually the Case, in respect of many of the poetic Effusions recorded in the BIBLE, and sometimes in a less Degree in other Instances. That most ancient Piece of excellent poetical Devotion, which we have in Exod. xv. was the Production of a Mind struck with the Contemplation of the Divine Perfections, particularly those of *Power* and *Goodness*, as displayed in the great Event which is the Subject of it. And this was the Case with the blessed Virgin, Luke i. 46. and even of the holy Angels themselves, Luke ii. 14, &c. who in the Midst of their Relation of the Birth of our SAVIOUR, suddenly break forth into a most sublime Exaltation, and Ascriptions of *Glory to God in the highest*. Hence we see, that if *Poetry* does not confer a *devout Elevation*
of

of Mind, a devout Elevation of Mind, may be productive of devout Poetry.

D O C T O R.

“ The Effence of Poetry is Invention :
 “ Such Invention as, by producing something
 “ unexpected, surprizes and delights. The
 “ Topics of Devotion are few, and being few
 “ are univerfally known ; but, few as they
 “ are, they can be made no more ; they can
 “ receive no Grace from Novelty of Senti-
 “ ment, and very little from Novelty of
 “ Expreffion.”—Page 415.

R E M A R K.

Fictitious Invention, which is what, I suppose, the Doctor means, is not *essentially necessary* to every kind of Poetry; for there is (strictly speaking) none of it in the BIBLE, where we find the best Poetry. In reality, the Essence of Poetry lies rather in the Grandeur and Sublimity of the Sentiment, the Boldness and Justness of the Metaphors and Figures, and the harmonious Turn of the Expression. The divinely inspired Poet does not *invent*, but *receive* his Ideas of the Subject; the uninspired Christian Poet finds them in his System of Religion,

igion, readily invented to his Hand. (Though never the less poetic for that.) His Business, therefore, is only to expatiate upon them, and so arrange the Forms of Expression, as to render the whole pleasing, to the Mind, by its Harmony. And the Pleasures of Harmony will always naturally assist Devotion, and render it peculiarly delightful.

D O C T O R.

“ Poetry pleases by exhibiting an Idea
 “ more grateful to the Mind, than things
 “ themselves afford. This Effect proceeds
 “ from the Display of those Parts of Nature
 “ which attract, and the Concealment of those
 “ which repel the Imagination: But Religion
 “ must be shewn as it is; *Suppression* and
 “ *Addition* equally corrupt it; and such as it
 “ is, it is known already.”

R E M A R K.

All this is very well said, but what is it to the Purpose intended? The divine Poet has no Occasion to *add*, or *suppress*, any Thing in his Attempts to assist Devotion. It is sufficient for his Purpose, that he paraphrases the general well-known Principles of Religion; draws out
 their

their more reserved and hidden Beauties; sets them in a Variety of Lights; and expresses them in such harmonious Numbers as are peculiar to Poetry; all which would, of course, exhibit to the Mind *Ideas more grateful* than *Things themselves*, represented any other way could do. And, while this Poet keeps closely to the Tenor of the divine Word, or the Analogy of Faith, he may, this way, serve the Interest of Religion in general, and of Devotion in particular, very essentially. That *Religion is known already*, can be no Reason why we should say nothing about it: Upon this principle all preaching must be intirely useless, and the whole Army of Clergy of course disbanded. But if we may talk of Religion in *Prose*, tho' *such as it is it is known already*, why not in *Verse* also? But let the Doctor himself speak, and he will decide in favour of my Argument. “KNOWN TRUTHS,” (says the Doctor, Vol. I. Page 254, Life of Milton) “may take a different Appearance, and be conveyed to the Mind, by a new Train of intermediate Images.”

D O C T O R.

“From Poetry the Reader justly expects, and

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“from

“ from *good* Poetry always obtains, the En-
 “ largement of his Comprehension, and Ele-
 “ vation of his Fancy ; but this is rarely to
 “ be hoped by Christians from metrical
 “ Devotion.”

R E M A R K.

What is here said of the Efficacy of good Poetry is true, but the consequent Assertion contradicts the daily Experience of the devout Christian ; and, I doubt not, the Doctor himself has read the Specimens of metrical Devotion in the BIBLE, and others of merely human Composition, and has found Enlargement of Comprehension, and Elevation of Mind the happy Effect ; or his Mind must be strangely indisposed.

D O C T O R.

“ Whatever is great, desirable, tremendous,
 “ is comprehended in the Name of the Su-
 “ preme Being.”

R E M A R K.

A very just, noble, and truly pious Sentiment, but nothing to the Purpose of the Doctor's Argument. The Majesty of GOD, tremendously awful as it is, (through his gracious
 Condescension)

Condescension) does not forbid us speaking of it in *Verse*, any more than in *Prose*. And such is the Grandeur and Elevation of Style peculiar to Poetry, that it is more especially adapted to the Purpose of speaking of Him with that Warmth of Affection and Dignity of Expression which the infinite Greatness of the Subject requires.

D O C T O R.

——“ Omnipotence cannot be exalted;
“ Infinity cannot be amplified; Perfection
“ cannot be improved.” P. 416.

R E M A R K.

What has this fine declamatory Sentence to do with *Verse*, any more than with *Prose*? It holds as good against the one as the other. However, certain it is that *our Ideas* of the different Displays of Omnipotence may be exalted—of Infinity amplified, and of Perfection improved, and that Poetry is peculiarly adapted to answer this End.

D O C T O R.

“ The employments of pious Meditation
“ are, Faith, Thanksgiving, Repentance, Sup-
“ plication. Faith, invariably uniform, can-

“ not be invested by Fancy with Decorations,
 “ Thanksgiving, the most joyful of all holy
 “ effusions, yet addressed to a Being without
 “ passions, is confined to a few Modes, and is
 “ to be felt rather than expressed. Repen-
 “ tance trembling in the Presence of the
 “ Judge, is not at Leisure for Cadences and
 “ Epithets—Supplication to GOD can only
 “ cry for Mercy.”

R E M A R K.

All this is prettily conceived and prettily
 expressed; but a slight attention to it will
 convince us, that it is little or nothing to the
 Doctor's purpose.

Let us consider it particularly.

First, *Faith invariably uniform cannot be
 decorated by Fancy.* Why not? Is not the
 Doctor's person uniformly the same, but is it
therefore incapable of Decoration? If not,
 why may not *Faith*, notwithstanding its in-
 variable Uniformity, be capable of Decora-
 tion, if not by Fancy, yet by sublime Senti-
 ments about it, poetically expressed? If the
 Doctor means the *Object of Faith*, or the Chris-
 tian Doctrine; though that is invariably uni-
 form in all its leading and essential Truths;
 yet

yet those Truths are various, and admit of poetic Elevations of Thought, enlivening Epithets, and all the Beauties of proper Tropes and Figures, poetically arranged. If he means the *Grace* or *Principle* of Faith in the Heart, that also may, like other Graces, be nourished, animated, and drawn out into proper Exercise, by such Illustrations, and striking Views of its particular Objects, as good Poetry will always afford. As to *Thanksgiving*, the Idea of its being an *Effusion* in Opposition to *Expression*, as the Doctor represents it, is rather awkward, because what is *effused* is *expressed*. And though it may be *better felt than expressed* in words (I suppose the Doctor means) yet it ought also to be expressed some how; and may be as well expressed in *Verse* as in *Prose*, and sometimes much better. Nor is GOD's being without *Passions* any more a Reason against our addressing him in *Verse* than in *Prose*. And it is certain that we are commanded not only to do the latter, but the former also; not only *speak* but *sing* his Praises. Our Poetry is not intended to move the DEITY, but *ourselves*. Again, *trembling Repentance*, though it be not *always* at *Leisure* to attend to Cadences and Epithets, yet some-

times it may, with peculiar Advantage. The contrite Affections are often excited and engaged in the most lively and devout exercises, by suitable Compositions in Verse, as most Christians can witness. And it is certain, that *David*, when *trembling before his Judge*, in the deepest sorrows of real Repentance for the most shocking sins, was at Leisure for Cadences and Epithets, as appears from the fifty-first Psalm which was composed on that awful occasion. And this may be proportionably the case with any other poetical Genius, though not under the power of special divine Inspiration.

Supplication is, indeed, *a Cry for Mercy*, but that cry may, sometimes at least, be expressed with the greatest Propriety and Fervor, in plaintive Numbers, or poetical Entreaty, as appears from the Book of Psalms, and many other passages in the Sacred Writings. The like may be observed of many merely human Compositions of the poetic kind.

D O C T O R.

“ Of sentiments purely religious, it will be
 “ found that the most simple Expression is the
 “ most Sublime.”

R E M A R K.

R E M A R K.

Most certainly. But may not the most simple expressions be used in *Poetry* as well as in *Prose*? Poetry does not forbid, or necessarily destroy simplicity. The Poet's Business is not always to paint, or dress up his Subject in the gaudy Colours of fictitious Ornaments, or gay Epithets, and figurative Forms of Speech: This is to be done only for the sake of variety, or where simplicity would be too low or feeble to strike the Mind of the Reader. A great deal of the most affecting Excellency of Poetry lies in elevated Sentiments expressed with a natural Simplicity, or an harmonious Arrangement of the plainest Words. A pompous Obscurity is one of its greatest Blemishes. With this natural Simplicity and harmonious Arrangement of Expression the Sacred Writings abound. It is the part of the devout Poet now to follow these Models. He needs no more.

D O C T O R.

“ Poetry loses its Lustre and its Power,
 “ because [*when*] it is applied to the Deco-
 “ ration of something more excellent than
 “ itself.”

R E M A R K.

R E M A R K.

It is not the Business of Poetry always to decorate its Subject by adding any thing to it more intrinsically excellent than itself; but it may contribute much to this End, by enumerating its Excellencies, and displaying its Beauties in a poetical Manner; and where *Poetry* cannot decorate the *Subject*, the *Subject* may decorate the *Poetry*, and render it both delightful and profitable.

D O C T O R.

“ The Ideas of Christian Theology are too
 “ simple for Eloquence; too sacred for Fic-
 “ tion; and too majestic for Ornament.”
 P. 416, 417.

R E M A R K.

Too simple for Eloquence! As if Eloquence was inconsistent with *simplicity!* This, however, is not the Case, as appears beyond all contradiction, from numbers of Discourses composed by some of the most eminent Divines of the Doctor's own Church; and more abundantly still from the Sacred Writings, especially those of *Moses, David, Isaiah, Paul,* &c. where we find the most powerful and
 moving

moving Eloquence in the most simple Forms of Expression. And if the Christian Theology admits of *Prosaic* Eloquence, why not of *poetic*? which, indeed, those Writings shew it actually does. The *Biblical Theology*, it is allowed, is *too sacred* for *Fiction*, i. e. any thing the mere Invention of creative Fancy, or the finical Decorations with which the pagan, and some Christian Writers have dressed out their Verses.—For such Ornaments the devout Poet has no Occasion; his Religion itself will furnish him with infinitely better; and is, indeed, *too Majestic* for such tinsel Trappings: It requires not *finery* but *energy* of Sentiment and Language; not the *Play of Fancy*, but the animated *Expression* of *real Passion*.

From these few Remarks I trust it will appear, to every attentive and impartial Reader, that Doctor *Johnson's* Ideas of religious Poetry, as expressed in the above Passages, are far from being just; and rather the fallies of a warm and sportive Imagination, than the genuine Dictates of sober Reason and sound Judgment. His Language is often striking and pleasing, but the Sentiments expressed by it,

it, though pompous, are sometimes without any just meaning, and contradictory even to his own Notions, as they appear elsewhere, as well as to the Experience of the generality of serious Readers.

I do not pretend to assert that the devout Poet, when about to address his God, with his Adorations and Praises, Confessions and Petitions, &c. should *always* do it in *Verse*, or, indeed, *generally* so; or in every Prayer or Thanksgiving, be studying a poetical Arrangement of his Ideas and Expressions, or hunt after Cadences and Epithets; this would be ridiculous; but, certainly, he *sometimes* may, and sometimes will, almost spontaneously, and before he is aware, fall into this Way; and think and speak poetically with great pleasure, and even Advantage to himself; at other times, he may make use of such Compositions in Verse, as his own Genius has produced before, or such as that of other Poets afford him, and find his devout Affections more enlivened, and elevated, than he would otherwise have done.

Poetry, though it be not the *Mother* of Devotion is a very useful *Handmaid* to it. The most sincerely pious sometimes feel the powers
of

of the spiritual Life languish, their Hearts shut up, cold, debilitated, and scarcely able to raise a thought towards Heaven as they wish; at such unhappy Seasons, they often find a divine Song, or piece of Sacred Poetry, seize their Attention, kindle up their holy Affections, and fill their whole Soul with the Power and Comforts of the divine Life. To this the Experience of the most eminent for pious Converse with the DEITY, in all ages of the World, bears the fullest Testimony; and, amongst the rest, I hope even that of the Doctor himself.* Indeed, Poetry has ever been a principal Instrument in the Hand of the divine Providence, of cherishing and supporting the Spirit of Piety and the Interest of Religion and Virtue amongst Mankind; it bears a part in one of the most useful and delightful Branches of divine Worship both in Earth and Heaven; is peculiarly adapted to give us the sweetest Foretaste of the Enjoyments of that blissful World, and prepare us for them. But to all this the Idea the Doctor has given us of devotional Poetry is the very reverse——

* These Remarks were written long before the Doctor's Death. His Devotions have been published since.

The

The human Mind is naturally formed for the Pleasures of Harmony. The Love of it is a kind of universal Passion, felt by all Ranks and Degrees of Men, from the King upon the Throne to the strolling Beggar, and encouraged amongst uncultivated Savages as well as in the politest Courts. Such as are incapable of poetic Compositions themselves, delight to hear, and read, and sing those of others : They find them peculiarly adapted, not only to enliven the Amusements of both the social and solitary Life, but also the Exercises of public and private Worship. There is scarcely a Temple, or any Place sacred to Devotion in the whole World, where the Voice of Poetry is not heard. Even Pagans approach the Altars of their Deities, and celebrate their Praises in melodious Numbers.* While the Prophets and Apostles of the LIVING AND TRUE GOD, call upon us, both by Precept and Example,

* HESIOD begins his Oper. Dier. in this stile :

Μῆσαι Πιερίθεν αἰοῖσσι κλῆισσαι,
Δεῦτε, Δι' ἐννεπέτε σφ' ἑτέρον πατέρ' ὕμνευσσαι.

Pierian Muses, fam'd for pleasing Lays,
Come now, and sing the God your Father's praise.

HOMER.

to speak of his adorable Perfections, and tell of his wonderful Works, in *Psalms and Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*. And, indeed, as the poetic Genius is the special Gift of GOD, it ought undoubtedly, and in Point of Gratitude, to be employed in his Service. It is true, through the Corruption of the human Heart, and the false Taste that prevails in the World, this divine Gift is too often engaged in the

HOMER speaking of the sacrifice of Chryses to Apollo, sings thus, Il. A. v. 472.

Οἱ δὲ πανημεριοὶ μολπή Θεοῦ ἱλασκόντο,
Καλλὸν αἰδούντες παιήονα κέροι Ἀχαιῶν
Μελποῦντες ἐκαεργον — That is,

Through the whole Day the Grecian Youths prolong,
To please the God, the sweet melodious Song,
And celebrate his far extending Power
With their loud Praises, 'till the Evening Hour.

The famous Hymn of *Cleanthes* to *Jupiter* is a Testimony to the same purpose.

HORACE also has several Odes of this kind. See Carm. Lib. I. Od. x, xii, xxi, xxiv, &c. All this the Doctor knew very well — I would therefore ask, shall Heathens, even with the Critics Approbation, pay their poetic Respects so liberally to their pretended deities, and the Christian Muse be aw'd into Silence by his severe Censures, when disposed to raise the Sacred Song in Honour of the MOST HIGH GOD, or to thank him for his Goodness to which we owe all our Enjoyments?

Service.

Service of Hell, and made the Instrument of promoting Impiety and Vice. But there is something so exceedingly base and wicked in this, that the sober Mind revolts at the Idea. Nor is it reasonable to suppose, that an Endowment of such high Original, and so capable of serving the Interest of Religion, and the immortal Happiness of Mankind, should be employed ONLY in the Business of even innocent Amusement.

But to whatever vicious or trifling Purposes the Genius for Poetry may be debased, yet its natural, and unbiassed Tendency, is certainly towards its Celestial Source; and, when replenished with the Oil of Divine Grace, purified and kindled into a Flame by the enlivening Power of its great Author, it immediately ascends upwards, and carries the whole Soul from Earth to Heaven; enables it to enter within the Veil, to pay its due Homage at the Eternal Throne, and to hold delightful Communion with GOD, and the REDEEMER; and thus affords its Possessor the most refreshing Prælibations of the Pleasures of the upper and better World.—That World, where, as the Sacred Writings inform us, *poetical Devotion* makes an essential Part of the Employment and
Felicity

Felicity of its blessed Inhabitants ; where their Minds, though raised to the most *exalted State of contemplative Piety* ; though they behold the great Object of their Worship in all the *most awful Majesty* of his Character ; and see Religion in its greatest Resplendence and Dignity ; yet perceive not the least Inconsistency between the *Grandeur* of their Ideas, and the *Decorations* of Sacred Verse. Accordingly, they are represented as expressing their Adorations and Praises in the most rapturous Strains of poetic Harmony.

It may be here objected, perhaps, “ That we know little or nothing of the *Manner* of Worship in the heavenly World — That it must, however, be infinitely more spiritual than ours ; for *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entered into the Heart of Man the Things which God hath prepared for them that love him* ; and that the Descriptions given us in the Holy Scriptures are purely figurative, suited to our present grosser Modes of Conception ; and consequently that nothing can be gathered from hence in favour of the Argument against *Doctor Johnson*.”

To which it may be answered,—That the

C

Love

Love of Harmony, and the Capacity of being delighted with it, is essential to the human Nature;—That this Nature is (in every Thing essential to it) the same in that World as in this; and, therefore, something analogous to what we feel here, or that will produce the like Effect, though in an infinitely higher Degree, will be the Case there. But, be this as it may, it is sufficient, for the Confirmation of the Point I am pleading for, that God himself is pleased to make Use of those figurative Expressions, in describing the Manner of his Worship in that more Spiritual State; and, consequently, that He approves of their being understood and used in their literal Sense in the mean Time. Accordingly, devout Poetry has been always justly admired, and held in the highest Estimation in all Ages of the World, and by all Ranks and Degrees of Men, learned and unlearned, here and there a cold Speculatist, or capricious Philosopher excepted. In short, its Use and Importance is suggested by divine Revelation itself; and so many and great are the Pleasures arising from it to the generality of the truly Pious, that to be deprived of its Assistance, would be to them an unspeakable Calamity.

T H E E N D.

A
SHORT ESSAY
ON
GENIUS.

By DANIEL TURNER, M. A.

O imitatores, servum Pecus, ut mihi sæpe
Bilem, sæpe jocum, vestri movêre tumultus !
Libera per vacuum posui vestigia princeps :
Non aliena meo pressi pede. Qui sibi fidit
Dux, regit Examen.

HOR. Ep. xix. l. i.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following short Essay on *Genius* was occasioned by some cursory Thoughts upon the Subject, committed to paper by way of Literary Amusement—It accompanies the preceding Remarks on Doctor *Johnson's* Strictures as not an improper Appendix to them, and with the Hope of affording the studious Reader some Amusement also.

The Author has never seen Doctor *Gerard's* Essay; nor had he read what Doctor *H. Blair* has said upon the Subject in his elegant Lectures, 'till this little Sketch was finished as it now appears, one paragraph excepted, which arose intirely from the Part of the Subject with which it is connected.

ABINGDON, *Oct.* 20, 1785.

A Short ESSAY on GENIUS, &c.

GENIUS is a kind of innate Energy, or Force of Intellect, enabling us to penetrate into the Reason and Nature of Things, and to perceive their Connections, Dependencies, and Powers, in a Manner particularly clear, and so as to lead it into some extraordinary Improvement in Knowledge.—It is the Soul's Power of thinking, not only *for* but *from* itself, with a Kind of Sovereign Freedom and Independence, except on the BEING that inspires it:—It is a Ray of celestial Light that leads the Mind into those Arcana of Nature, which, to all others, are involved in impenetrable Darknefs. It has often more of the Fire of a warm Imagination, than the cooler Powers of solid Judgment;

and, in all its primary Operations, depends more upon it ; 'tis, therefore, very frequently found in the highest degree of Vigour, where Judgment appears to be very defective. *Judgment* may give Rules to GENIUS, keep it within its proper Bounds, and render its Efforts more useful to the World, and to its Possessor ; and, sometimes, they happily meet in the same Person ; but, when that Fire, which is the Life and Soul of *Genius*, burns in its full Strength, it is too apt to disdain all Rules, and flies out far and wide, without controul, through the pathless Regions of Imagination.

TASTE is the Feeling of GENIUS. True Taste is *Genius* corrected by Judgment. To attain a true Taste, we must not only possess a peculiarly quick and lively Sensibility, but cultivate and adjust it, by nice Observation and the sober Exercise of the Understanding.

GENIUS may be considered, as *general* and *particular*. A *particular* Genius confines its Energy, Taste, and Operations, to particular Subjects ; such as *Music, Poetry, Astronomy, Mechanics, &c.* and, if not mixed with good Sense, and some Knowledge of the World,

'tis

'tis apt to contract itself, and degenerate into Pedantry. The *general* is sometimes capable of taking in the leading Principles of the whole Circle of Science, at least so far as to strike out something new in every Department of it. The Instances, indeed, of this universal Capacity of Mind, are very few; but we have many of such as excel in the more *particular*.

Amongst the *particular Geniuses* we find too many of a vicious and mischievous Tendency, such as Cheats and Pickpockets, and a vast Number of other Abusers of the Credulity, and Plunderers of the Property of Mankind. Some, though not properly vicious, are absolutely trifling, excelling only in the Arts of Amusement of the lowest kind, such as juggling, tumbling, wire-dancing, flying from the tops of steeples, and the like; while others are more solid and useful; such as are displayed in the Mechanic and Polite Arts, the learned Sciences, the Conduct of military Atchievements, and the Police of civil Government.

All *Genius* must be owing, either to the particular Construction and Force of the inte-

rior and more refined Parts of the Animal System; or, to a particular *divine* Impulse upon the Soul, if virtuous, or *diabolical* if vicious; or perhaps to both. However, the great Variety of *Geniuses*, which have always appeared in the World, and their being so wonderfully adapted to the Times, and the Circumstances of Mankind, and all so limited and over-ruled as we see they are, certainly afford a very strong Argument in Favour of a divine Providence, as superintending all human Affairs, and as the first Spring that moves them.

Genius is not to be taught, or acquired, or any way communicated by human Power. It must be born with us, or be imparted supernaturally. This last seems to have been sometimes the Case; witness the curious workmanship of the *Mosaic Tabernacle*, in the Hands of a People, at that Time, remarkably stupid, and destitute of every Trace of real *Genius*. No man will ever *shine* in any Profession for which he has not this particular cast of Mind, or, into which he does not enter with that peculiar Force and Spirit we call *Genius*.

But though this intellectual Power be thus constitutional,

constitutional, or the Special Gift of God, and sometimes blazes out, merely by the force of its own native Energy, with surprising Lustre, particularly in the poetic Line ; yet it may certainly be very much improved, both in its Brilliancy and Vigour, by proper Culture ; and, generally, some Culture is necessary, in order, not only to prescribe proper Limits to its Propensities, and to regulate its Efforts, but also to remove those Heaps of Rubbish, which some Fault in the Constitution, some accidental Occurrence, or untoward Situation in Life, may have thrown in its Way ; and to warm and animate its latent seeds, and call them forth into action. For the want of this, many a *Genius* has come into the World, and gone out of it, without ever being publicly noticed ; and many others have only just dawned upon us, and then suddenly disappeared ; or, if continued, have laboured under so many Difficulties and Discouragements ; or, have been so overspread with the dark Clouds of Adversity, as never to be able to shine out in the Fulness of their native Strength and Glory ; though, otherwise, they might have enlightened their respective Periods of Existence, and spread amongst their Contemporaries

temporaries a great deal of pleasing and useful Knowledge.

Perhaps, in this neglected Spot is laid

Some Heart, once pregnant with celestial Fire ;
Hands that the Rod of Empire might have sway'd,
Or wak'd to Extasy the living Lyre.

But knowledge, to their Eyes, her ample page,
Rich with the Spoils of Time, did ne'er unroll ;
Chill Penury repress'd their noble Rage,
And froze the genial Current of their Soul.

Full many a Gem of purest ray serene

The dark unfathom'd Caves of Ocean bear ;
Full many a Flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its Sweetness in the desert Air.

Some Village-*Hampden*, that with dauntless Breast,
The little Tyrant of his Fields withstood ;
Some mute inglorious *Milton* here may rest,
Some *Cromwell* guiltless of his Country's Blood.

Gray's Elegy in a Country Church Yard.

Why it is thus is amongst the Arcana of Providence.

Men of no *Genius*, when they do think,
think after others ;—they have no sentiments
that they can properly call their own, none,
but what they receive from Instruction, or
borrow or steal from those they converse with.
But Men of *Genius* cannot bear to tread the
dull

dull path of mere Imitation, or depend upon others. They possess a kind of *Originality* of Thought and Invention, and, therefore, of Course, take the lead of the rest of Mankind; the wiser Part of which are content to follow them, and improve upon their Hints; amongst the less Wise, there is a stupid herd of half *Imitators*, and half Rivals of the Wiser few, who say their sayings, and do their doings, over and over again; or rather *unsay*, and *undo* all, rendering, by the foolishness of their Manner, both Copy and Original contemptible.

Minds inspired with true *Genius* have generally a nice Sense of the *honourable*, a *Generosity* of Temper, a virtuous Pride, that secures them against all unbecoming Servility, and all the mean and selfish Passions; particularly against the Guilt of *Plagiarism* in their Literary Compositions; and, therefore, when they borrow, as will sometimes be the Case, they will be sure to make due Acknowledgments of the Obligation.—And as they always feel some Degree of Pleasure in the just Thoughts and Inventions of others, in proportion to the Marks of *Genius* discernable in them; so, when these Marks are very clear and strong, they find

find all the Powers of sympathetic Affection awakened in their Breasts, and this very often to the pitch of rapturous Enthusiasm.

Genius admits of a Variety of Degrees, risings and fallings, even in the same person at different times; that is, it does not *always* appear, and exert its Power in its own peculiar and characteristic Manner. They who possess it in very great perfection, have their Paroxysms, their Fits and Starts, which hold them a longer and shorter Time, as it happens. While the full power of *Genius* is upon them, they think and act like themselves, they astonish and delight: At other times they are as dull and uninventive, as trite and common place as other men. At least, this has been the Case with many of our poetic *Geniuses*. *Homer* himself has sometimes noded; and of *Milton* it is said, that he found his *Genius* in the greatest Perfection and Vigour from about the autumnal to about the vernal Equinox. It may be supposed, therefore, that he wrote his *Paradise Regained* in some other Season of the Year, when he mistook the mere desire of writing poetically for the inspiring Influence of this peculiar Afflatus, the Glow of *Genius*.

It is owing to the favoured Subjects of
Genius,

Genius, under the Influence and Blessing of the divine Providence, that those Arts and Sciences, to which we owe the Sublime Pleasures of the most improved Philosophy, the principal Accommodations and Elegancies of Life, and the Power of enjoying them with the most rational Satisfaction, have been carried to such a Degree of Perfection amongst us as they are.—That almost infinite Variety, which we meet with to gratify the Eye, the Ear, the Taste, and the still more exalted Powers of Imagination and Reason, are all (the mere Products of Nature excepted) the Effects of *Genius*: Without this animating and enterprising Principle, Mankind would follow one another, from Generation to Generation, like mere Cattle, in one narrow beaten Track, without any deviation or change for the Improvement even of their Pleasures of Body or Mind. It is *Genius* that pushes them out of the long trodden Road of mere instinctive and traditionary Manners, and urges them to explore new Treasures of Knowledge in the wide Regions of Matter and Spirit; and to seek higher and nobler Entertainments, in the Business and Enjoyments of Life, than their Fathers. It is from
thence

thence we see a so much more beautiful Face of Things in the cultivated Parts of *Europe* and *Asia*, than in the Wilds of *America*, and the *Cape of Good Hope*. BRITAIN had never spread her Arms, her Arts, her Religion and Liberty through the distant Nations of the Earth, and brought such mighty Treasures from them, had there been no such *Genius* as that of *Columbus*; nor had we ever been able to range, with so much rational Satisfaction and delightful Wonder through the vast extent of our solar System, had there been no *Copernicuses*, or *Newtons*.

It is true, RELIGION, which is the most interesting and important concern of all that can engage our Attention, does not depend on *Genius*, but on something more common to us all, even the *Grace of GOD in JESUS CHRIST*. A Man of no *Genius* may be as true a Christian, and as sincere a penitent as one of the greatest, though not so extensively useful. The Character of the great Author of our Faith does not strike us with the Glitter of *Genius*, but with the more solid Lustre of divine Wisdom, and the most perfect moral Excellence, which is still infinitely more sublime. *Genius* is the natural Gift of
GOD,

GOD, which he bestows upon particular Persons as a Token of his *providential Favour*; but the *Principle of true Religion* is a Token of his *Special Grace*. The former may be the Means of raising us to great Honours, and of affording us many refined Pleasures in this World—but the latter exalts us to the Dignity of Sons of GOD, impresses on our Hearts his own moral Likeness in Purity, Righteousness, Benevolence, and brings us at last into the Possession of immortal Felicity and Glory.

But even RELIGION has been often greatly assisted by this natural Gift of GOD. Our first emerfions from Popish Darknefs and Superstition, and their innumerable attendant Miseries, were, under the divine Providence, much indebted to the singular Courage and Knowledge of Men who dared to think out of the common Track; that is, to the energy of that *pious Genius*, which distinguished our first Reformers. And who were the greatest Patrons of our Civil and Religious Liberties in the Ages following, but the *Raleighs*, the *Sidneys*, the *Boyles*, the *Lockes*, the *Addifons*, Men of eminently distinguished *Genius*? In a word—As *Genius* is the Parent of the most remarkable

remarkable and important Improvements in human Knowledge and Happiness, next to those derived from divine Revelation, it has always been justly admired and patronized by every one capable of discerning its Excellencies. Even they who have no *Genius* themselves, gaze with pleasing Astonishment on the Effects of its Power in others. But what these admire from Ignorance, Men of *Genius* admire from Knowledge;—Admire, therefore, with a relish and delight peculiar to themselves, and such as even *Genius* itself cannot fully describe.

T H E E N D.

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